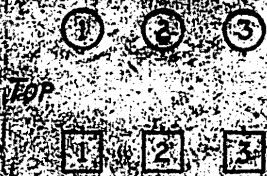


# Some Notes on Dancing in Orkney

In my fourth article, describing the Nine Ronaldsay Sixsome Reel, I gave the descriptions of some other dances which I learnt in Orkney last summer.

The first is the Sixsome Reel. At one time this was danced in all the places which I visited, but some time ago that it was difficult to obtain a good description. I give here a lesson from Flotta which I obtained from Mr. and Mrs. Robert Ross of Sandoy, Mr. Frederick Sutherland of Voudraak, and Mrs. Mowat of Sandoy. This last two learnt it during the revival of this dance in Flotta in 1920.

These couples take part, standing in two partners as shown in Fig. IX (the circles represent men, the squares ladies). Partners should be about 4 1/2 feet apart and about 3 feet from the next couple.



The first part of the dance is performed to any strathspey tune (played at the traditional tempo of 42-43 bars per minute).

Bar 1-8. The dancers run the reel. They dance a figure eight. The couples start the reel by moving in the direction shown by the arrows.

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In Fig. X the men following immediately behind their partners, and the first couple passing between second and third couples.

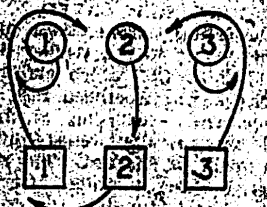


Fig. X

The couples then move in the direction shown in Fig. XI, all finishing in original places as in Fig. IX, facing partners.

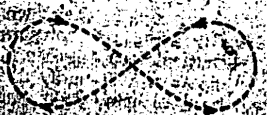


Fig. XI

When learning to run the reel it is helpful if the men place their hands on their partner's shoulders or wrists, but in the actual dance partners should not touch each other.

Bars 9-16. All dance, i.e. set to each other with suitable setting steps.

Bars 17-48. The sequence of bars is repeated twice, the settings being varied, if possible.

The music is now changed to a reel (any reel tune will do), and the alternate running the reel and dancing is repeated three times in reel tempo.

The travelling step used in running the reel in strathspey time is the same as that used in the Axum Reel which I have already described.

To run the reel in reel time, the commonest step appeared to be the chase.

Bar 1. Count "and one." Step forward on right foot.

Count "two." Cross left foot behind right foot (usually left in step or left toe to right heel).

Count "three." Step forward (a small step) on right foot.

Bar 2. Repeat the same movements beginning with the opposite foot each time.

There is a certain amount of spring on the count "and one" (it is almost "spring forward on right foot"), and the weight is kept well forward during the step. Most people seem to dance this step with their knees slightly slack.

This step is again a traditional step all over Scotland, and was a great deal used in Country Dancing. Another step, which was used as the skip-change-of-step, now adopted as standard by the Scottish Country Dance movement, but among the people I spoke of the chase was the more common of the two steps.

The commonest setting step in strathspey time was the Highland Singlestep, but Highland Fling steps were also used. In reel time the commonest step was the pas de Basque.

When the Sixsome Reel was used as the Bride's Reel, the three couples (numbered as in Fig. IX) were respectively the bride and groom, the bridesmaid and best man, and the honest folk. The dance was performed once through with the dancers in the positions shown. The fiddler then paused for a few seconds, the top man (the bridegroom) moved round the back of the other men to the bottom of the set, and the other top moved up one place. The dance was then repeated with the men in their new positions. A further pause, and a further change in the same manner, brought the honest man up to the top place to face the bride, and the dance was repeated once more in these positions.

I have heard that on some occasions the ladies changed places instead of the men, and there was probably no hard and fast rule.

It is interesting to note that when the Sixsome Reel was revived in Flotta about the year 1920, it was revived in the form used in the Bride's Reel, the dance being repeated three times with each man taking top place in turn.

I also learnt another version of the Sixsome Reel in Flotta, this one from Mr. and Mrs. David Flett of the Dam. This was similar to the preceding version, save that the dancers began to run the reel by moving in the directions shown in Fig. XII.

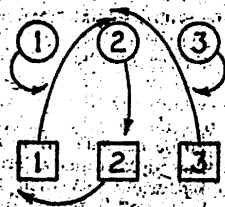


Fig. XII

I have also recorded two other versions, one from South Ronaldsay, the other from North Ronaldsay. In each the general pattern is similar to that of the Flotta version. There are obviously a number of different ways in which the dancers can run the reel in this dance, and it is probable that there was no way which could be said to be correct in the absolute sense. A traditional dance is rarely the fixed and static thing which one finds in books of dances, but tends to be modified with time and use.

I also heard from several people of an Eightsome Reel very similar in general style to the Sixsome Reel. Here again the couples stood in two lines, the men in one line facing their partners in the other, and when running the reel the men again followed close behind their partners. But I very much regret that I could not find anyone who remembered this dance well enough to tell me how the dancers ran the reel. If any reader of the "Herald" can tell me more about this dance, I shall be extremely grateful.

(To be Concluded)